



The ABQ in rehearsal for *Shadowcatcher* with Maestro Jesus Medina and the Orquesta Sinfonica Carlos Chavez.

Plans for the 40th Anniversary.

By Raymond Mase

Hard to believe, but next season will mark the ABQ's 40th anniversary. It sounds like a long time, but when I think that I've been in the group for the 15th, 20th, 25th, 30th and 35th anniversaries - well, it is a long time. But these anniversaries give us the chance to not only celebrate our many years of music making, but also to reflect on where we are and where we're headed. The plans for this anniversary are very much on our minds and they are ambitious.

Nothing can celebrate the American Brass Quintet's four decades better than our music, and we're working on two new recordings to mark this milestone. The first project will be a CD of mixed repertoire, the type of diverse programming that has long been the trademark of our touring concerts. This recording is likely to be called *American Brass Quintessence* and will include music spanning 500 years - from recent ABQ commissions by Henri Lazarof and Anthony Plog, back through Victor Ewald's *Quintet No 2*, marches of Luigi Cherubini, *Contrapunctus VII* of J. S. Bach, canzons of Brade, fantasias of Stoltzer, and the earliest of our repertoire - chansons of Josquin des Prés from around 1500. This CD was recorded this past summer in Aspen with our Fyre and Lightening recording team of Mike Mermagen (engineer) and Louis Ranger (tonmeister). The second disc will be *American Brass "classics"* - not classics in the traditional sense of 18th century music, but the American quintets that have been the staples of our repertoire for years - Carter, Dahl, Whittenberg and Sanders. Performed countless times by the ABQ, we are in the midst of recording these masterworks with Judy Sherman who produced our *New American Brass* recording from 1991.

Of course for a recording to get from "in the cans" to "in the stores" is a very long and formidable journey. One might think that recording a piece is simply playing through the music and touching up a rough spot here or there. In fact, recording is in many ways much more grueling work than performing. Generally we play through shorter sections of music; trying to capture the musical energy and flow of performance, while also focusing on perfect detailing and balance. Simply put - record a section, evaluate its content, fix its problems - over and over. This painstaking process will often take several hours for just a few minutes of music, meaning that a whole CD of music can require 14 or 15 recording hours. However once the sessions are over, these 14 or 15 recording hours turn into 40 or 50 hours of editing, a process where the best takes are selected and pieced together. For expediency, I have generally done much of our initial editing "solo" over the years, but once the engineer takes my plan and constructs the first edit, then the group gets involved. Now each of us makes a list of the little things that we hear on this edit that we think can still be improved upon. Back to the drawing board, I try to find better material for these hopefully few repairs ultimately producing the final edit - the version given to the record company for production. And don't forget the other little details needed for the CD like contracts, liner notes, group biography, credits, photos and releases - all of these things have to be done along the way as well. For us, if a CD is out in less than a year after we've recorded, it is a big accomplishment. And if these two new CDs aren't enough, Summit Records is planning to release the two recordings not only individually, but in a 40th anniversary three CD set (along with a "best of the ABQ" CD compiled from our previous Summit discs) with historical notes and photos of the ABQ assembled by our 25th anniversary biographer Margaret Shakespeare. Hopefully these recording projects will be completed in time for our 40th anniversary concert at Tully Hall next fall (sorry the exact date is still to be determined). In true ABQ fashion, this concert will feature a program of all first performances - the premieres of new works by Robert Beaser and Melinda Wagner, and new "old" music editions from yours truly. Needless

to say, the 40th anniversary promises a lot of new ABQ music, and come to think of it-if we're going to keep these 40th anniversary projects from becoming 45th anniversary ones, I better get back to work. We'll keep you posted on the CDs and the Tully Hall date.



It's never all work and no play on the road--the ABQ sampling some of the fine local cuisine after their performance in Mexico City. (C'mon Ray, they are only pomegranate seeds!)

ROJAK ON THE ROAD

(by John Rojak)

Further tales of far-off lands, derring-do and mad-cap adventure from the caped crusader of brassdom and our readers' favorite columnist.

This year has turned out to be one filled with adventure for the ABQ. Last October we made a personnel change that affected me most dramatically. Before the last piece of Kevin's first concert I made an announcement concerning the significance of that evening. "Tonight marks my final concert after eight years," I said, as the other guys wondered (as usual) what words might spill from my lips, "as the New Guy in the group."

The timing of our change worked nicely in several ways. Chris' last concert was in Glens Falls, NY where we have a loyal audience after 15 years of performances. It was a nice crowd in a familiar place for this milestone of ABQ history. Two weeks later, Kevin's first day on the job was spent snorkeling in a pristine bay in Tortola, British Virgin Islands. "All our tours are like this!" we told him, suppressing memories of successive 7am flights as we criss-crossed the country for three or four days.

Ray and I started the Virgin Islands tour a couple of days before the other guys to do some teaching and masterclasses. And to make sure it was suitable for the ABQ. It turned out we had to work less than we expected. Our hard day started with a boat ride from Tortola to Virgin Gorda where we were met by our host for the day, Joe Szabo. Joe took us to a middle school and we had a one hour session with the brass students. Much of our time was spent perfecting the fabulous "60's Superhits Medley" featuring "Born to Be Wild" and "Na Na Na Na, Hey, Hey, Goodbye." After our class Joe gave us a tour of the island including a visit to his beautiful hilltop home and to meet his horses and the only zebras in the Caribbean. Then it was off to lunch at the world-class resort Dix Bay Hotel, built by Laurence Rockefeller in the style to which he was accustomed. We were enjoying the best buffet in the BVI (according to Fodor's, and who are we to argue) when the manager came by to greet us. "Are you Ray Mase? I was a trumpet student in New York in the late 70's and always wanted to meet you!" he said, reinforcing to me the fact that trumpet players get all the attention.

After we ate we took a boat back to Tortola and on to our second session for the day. We were there to coach a high school band with one of the most intense band directors we've encountered. By the time he finished tuning them and warming them up, Ray and I had about 10 minutes to impart our words of wisdom. Actually this guy inspired me to make sure I was warmed up and in tune for our concert! Before our third and final assignment we retreated to our hotel and recuperated by the pool. Then back to the high school for a jazz band rehearsal, which was led by the same excellent teacher. Since they were a few players short, Ray played a mean lead trumpet and I augmented the trombone section. I wish we could claim it was hard work, but.....

Day two came and since we had no more teaching scheduled the sponsors arranged a trip on a dive boat for some deep water snorkeling. Although the jerk sausage for breakfast didn't enhance my experience on the boat ride, once we put our faces in that clear sea we were in paradise. That evening David, Michael, and Kevin joined us and we assured them that things would be okay on this

ABQ tour. We brought the guys to the locals' barbecue restaurant for a great meal and briefed them on what to expect. In the morning, all of us went snorkeling to prepare for the concert. It was quite a time, although we're still not sure if Kevin realized that slathering suntan lotion on David's back was part of his new career.

The quintet returned to NY for a few days, then embarked on another short trip South again, this time to Florida. The first stop was Melbourne and our hotel was a generic sounding "Quality Suites". When we checked in I called our New Guy right away to see if he still liked traveling with the ABQ because these rooms really were suites, with terraces about 50 feet from the ocean! We veterans of the road knew it was a coincidence of lucky timing for Kevin, but we were all hoping that our future tours really would all be like these last two. Later on that trip we played in St. Augustine where we had a little time to do some historical sightseeing. We thought it was pretty neat to be America's oldest brass quintet in America's oldest city.

Finally, in March we had an opportunity for a tough day. We were booked in Bridgewater, Va., and the only way to get there was to get in a car and drive seven hours. Well, I have to report that the hardest part of the trip was from Lincoln Center twenty blocks (and 45 minutes) south to the Lincoln Tunnel. The next six hours went quickly with everybody sharing stories. As we crossed the Mason-Dixon Line we also discovered our New Guy's favorite fast food fetish--Waffle House. Being troupers, we gave it a try and found it to be an acceptable road snack, at least equal to Burger King and McDonald's.

Our next exotic tour would take the ABQ to Mexico City in September for the premiere of Eric Ewazen's *Shadowcatcher* for Brass Quintet and Orchestra. Prior to the quintet's visit, there was a request for two members to coach the orchestra's brass section for a week. The two New Guys were elected and Kevin and I prepared to go in early June. What we weren't prepared for was the slow communication from Mexico. We really didn't know we were going until three days before departure, and got our plane tickets about 45 minutes before the flight took off. This was not comforting. The plane was completely full, and somehow the aisle seats I had reserved vanished into cyberspace. After a sardine can style flight we were somewhat anxious about the week to follow. Luckily, once through customs the Mexican sun shone on us literally and figuratively.

The hotel was beautiful with a very good restaurant (great flan! but we never trusted the ice), and the students were eager to learn and a lot of fun to teach. Since we were teaching three hours a day, there was time for exploring. A fantastic guide was recommended to us and he brought us to the pyramids of the ancient city Teotihuacan. Enrique is an archeologist and seems to know everything about the history of Mexico. Suddenly I felt I might do much better on a history exam because of his clear, thorough explanations.

At the last teaching session, the students grew impatient half way through and suggested we end early. They had a little treat prepared for us--a tequila celebration! Kevin and I were game so we joined in a toast, followed by another, and another. After an hour, (it was still before 8pm) I said to Kevin, "If someone hit me as hard as they could now, I wouldn't feel it!" Then it was off to Garibaldi Square, where the Mariachi bands congregate and perform. This was a surreal sight. There were dozens of bands all over this large plaza. Many of the bands played right next to each other--it was a scene that made Charles Ives' music sound calm and simple. The next important lesson we learned was not to take the early flight home after a week in Mexico City.

So in September the New Guys were the experienced ones on the return trip to Mexico City. Ray, David, and Michael got to see Teotihuacan and the incredible Anthropological Museum, while Kevin and I discovered some new areas of the city. The most unexpected event came at the museum of Leon Trotsky's house. We almost passed it up, because my guidebook described it as "dull and depressing." But we had time and I thought at least the old newspaper clippings would be interesting. As we wandered into the house, a security guard was following us closely. It actually seemed a little creepy, so I turned and asked him a question about the house. Well, from that moment he became our friend and tour guide! He was dressed in black, with combat boots and a beret with Communist buttons on it, and could have leaped from a Che Guevara pamphlet. He knew

all the details of Trotsky's life and death-from where Trotsky and his wife hid during a failed assassination attempt to what part of the ice pick was used to murder him. We learned who visits most (North Americans) and which garden paths were changed after Trotsky's death. It was a fascinating afternoon, but now I know I have to catch up on a lot of reading by Trotsky, Lenin, Marx, and Stalin.

Incidentally, *Shadowcatcher* was quite a success. It was thrilling to hear an audience cheer for the ABQ like that. We of course celebrated with tequila, but this time knowing that we had a few extra hours before leaving on the afternoon flight home.

The upcoming season appears calmer, with travel around the US, but anything can happen on the road. Like last weekend. Our plane from Detroit to Newark took off, then started circling oddly and the pilot announced we had lost the number one engine. No need to worry, though, we have two more but we need to land and the crash crews will be waiting for us on the runway. Hey, we're flying, and the ABQ has a rehearsal at 7, can't we just coast to Newark? Fortunately, I'm not making those decisions and you'll get to read about more of our adventures on the road. See you then!

And in this corner...

by Kevin Cobb

It is days before we leave for a weekend in Indiana, then immediately comes our annual Juilliard concert and soon after, we continue the second of two recordings that have been ongoing since the Spring. And, oh yeah, I have to write this article before we leave Saturday. So has been my year with the ABQ. I blinked because my eyes were sore from keeping them open for too long - and there goes a year. But it has been a year for me to grow, and learn, and be challenged. It's been fun, yet difficult. I found myself swimming in new pieces just trying to keep up. And learning little things like what luggage will survive best on a weeks' tour or what foods Ray likes for "comfort food" (it's hamburgers). I also found myself in Aspen in the summer. "You'll have so much fun." people said. "What a relaxing place." others said. Nobody told me how much work was ahead of me. Nobody told me how stressful recording a CD in the middle of the summer could be. Or what it would be like to perform the premiere of the new Sampson quintet at the ABQ summer home of 30 years. Lots of pressure that made the mountains seem to dwindle and fade to the background. All this and I'm teaching too. All of a sudden, I have gone from taking lessons to giving lessons in a split second. Again, before I knew it, I blinked and the summer was gone.

Joining this group has at times been overwhelming. Certainly a challenge for me has been how to join an established ensemble like the ABQ, while following a player in the prime of his career. I remember being awed hearing the quintet for the first time. Awed by how the trumpets sounded like one person playing two parts. And while riding the subway a few years ago with John, we talked briefly about Chris. There were hungry rumors flying through the trumpet class at Juilliard that Chris had taken a Broadway show (which he had) and certainly he must be leaving the quintet (which he wasn't). And John said to me, "Can you imagine Chris leaving? I mean nobody can replace Chris." And I quite agree. Maybe it could be more like Steve Young coming after Joe Montana or Mantle after DiMaggio. It is a natural progression like the new growth after the heat of a forest fire--even the most established groups evolve. The question should not be "Can you compare with the old?" but rather "Can you offer something new?"

Of course, I've also come to realize what a special group it is and how lucky I am to be a part of it. I never thought about making a life playing quintet music, there just aren't many groups doing it - and nobody is doing it playing the repertoire ABQ does. And how many jobs do people get where they actually like the people they work with? My point is that when I accepted the position last fall, I knew I would have a lot of work ahead of me with regard to playing the trumpet, but there are many other things that go into making a chamber music ensemble work. Writing newsletter articles, for example. I am seeing that it has as much to do with taking care of the little things as it does the big

concerts and recordings. One of my first duties on my first official ABQ tour? Dave needed some suntan lotion on his back before swimming off the coast of the British Virgin Islands. On the second tour, John took Ray and me into Chicago to eat at a special Italian restaurant he knew about. I started to get a clear picture of personalities and how everyone genuinely liked each other - which is rare and of great importance with any job, but especially so in a chamber group. The quintet is a marriage; most of these guys have known each other as long or longer than they've known their wives! So I am comforted by the support from the other guys as I try and keep up with the rigors of quintet life. So what will my next year have in store? I think Mike knows, but is just keeping respectfully quiet, Dave probably has it in his computer somewhere, John has a recipe for it, and Ray, if he doesn't know, I know he'll worry about it for me. I think I'm in good hands. I'm honored and proud to be a part of the group and hope that I will find my own unique contribution to the quintet life. I look forward to meeting all the friends of the ABQ whom I have not met, and continuing good relations with those I have - at least, those I remember! See you at the concert hall!



Eric Ewazen and the ABQ in Mexico City after the orchestral world premiere of *Shadowcatcher*. The ABQ will perform and record the piece in its wind ensemble version this January with the Juilliard Wind Ensemble. The performance is on January 11, 2000 in the Juilliard Theater in Lincoln Center.

ABQ Premiere of *Shadowcatcher* in Mexico City

A Composer's perspective by Eric Ewazen

In late September I spent an amazing week in Mexico City, attending the rehearsals and performances of the orchestral premiere of my brass quintet concerto *Shadowcatcher* given by the American Brass Quintet with the Orquesta Sinfonica Carlos Chavez, under the direction of Jesus Medina. Over the years I have heard so many memorable ABQ concerts in NYC and Aspen, as they brilliantly displayed the world of brass chamber music to enthusiastic and appreciative audiences. But I must say, witnessing the ABQ cross national and language boundaries, and seeing them interact with their fellow Mexican musicians was a revelation. The ABQ has toured extensively around the world but this was my first time seeing how effectively, indeed joyfully, they communicate with a foreign audience.

The bilingual rehearsals were both intense and fun. With Maestro Medina's thorough, skillful direction the new piece came together quickly. The orchestra responded to the singular beauty of the ABQ's sound with passionate, emotional playing. The ABQ responded to the orchestral accompaniment by playing powerfully and dramatically, giving an extremely expressive rendition of the music. It also became apparent how appropriate it seemed to be premiering *Shadowcatcher*, a work based on Native American Indian legends and images, in Mexico, a country so closely identified with their own fantastic Indian heritage and culture.

In addition to all the rehearsing, there were also numerous opportunities to explore Mexico City, one of the most fascinating cities in the Western Hemisphere. At various times during the week, in between the preparations for the concerts and additional masterclasses held by the ABQ, we all did our own exploring: the Central Historic district with its vast open square, the Zocalo, its dramatic and beautiful Cathedral and a newly excavated temple (Templo Mayor) right in the heart of the city; a huge Saturday market in the elegant area of San Angel; the awe-inspiring Museo Nacional de Antropologica; and the culminating excursion to the monumental pyramids of Teotihuacan. At the extraordinary Mexican restaurants, we all sampled foods you just can't get in the U.S. -- dark, rich moles, and incredible variety of tamales, and Chiles en Nogada (a stuffed, breaded poblano pepper in a white nut sauce with pomegranates) -- a seasonal specialty we were lucky enough to try. We also sampled pulque, a sweet, mildly alcoholic drink made from the giant maguey cactus, various Mexican beers, and, of course, tequila. You understand, of course, this was after the concert!

With John Rojak leading the way, late in the evening we went to the one-of-a-kind Garibaldi Square.

This can best be described as a market for the local and regional Mariachi musicians. Dozens of these costumed ensembles, consisting of various combinations of trumpets, violins, guitars, harps, basses and accordions congregate in the square. You can pay them to perform specific songs, or hear them playing for other tourists and locals. People giving private parties drop on down to the square and hire these groups on the spot to come over to their homes and entertain. Obviously the best groups get snapped up quickly!

In front of a large, friendly audience, the orchestral premiere of *Shadowcatcher* took place on September 26th with a second performance occurring on September 28th at the National Arts Center.

It is moments like this that a composer lives for! The ABQ negotiated the virtuosic brass quintet parts with an always-elegant, rich sound, singing line after line, giving the phrases an incredible emotional charge. Under Maestro Medina's wonderfully musical interpretation, the orchestra gave buoyant, resonant support, singing their own lines in response to the ABQ's.

I was delighted to hear the audience's cheering reaction to the music - resulting in an encore of the last movement of the piece at both performances. Following the presentation of spectacular bouquets of local flowers to each of the ABQ members and myself, a final, informal reception with the orchestra members took place. Our last evening in Mexico City ended with this terrific spirit of camaraderie, new friendships, and the simple joy of music-making.



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